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ABSTRACT

Many contemporary inservice programs set out initially to change teachers' attitudes or gain some sense of commitment from teachers prior to the implementation of a new program. However, some research studies suggest that such efforts, in and of themselves, are unlikely to bring about any real change. Serious commitment is likely to occur only after teachers have had an opportunity to use the new program or innovation and have seen that it really assists them in teaching their students. Since serious teacher commitments rarely occur prior to the implementation of a new program, it is critically important to find alternative ways of encouraging teachers to engage in the new practice. Training by a person judged by the teachers to be credible is essential, and teachers must be provided with information that is useful and applicable to their daily experiences in the classroom, not theoretical overviews. In a study of Direct Instruction (a highly structured, basic skills approach) teachers' attitudes began to change when they saw positive evidence that this method improved the academic achievement of their students. In Mastery Learning programs, teachers' attitudes changed when they saw improvement in students' performances on weekly tests, and greater student involvement during class sessions. These changes did not occur quickly but evolved over a period of time. (JD)

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Transforming Teacher Reluctance to Teacher Commitment

In recent years an increasing number of school districts have initiated school improvement programs. Based on the findings of research studies on effective teaching practices (Brophy, 1979; Guskey, in press) and effective school practices (Edmonds, 1982; Purkey & Smith, 1983), the principle goal of these programs is to improve academic achievement. And in most cases, this translates to improving students' scores on standardized tests (Cuban, 1984).

The research on effective schools indicate that all levels of education are to some degree important in an improvement effort, from the state and district down to the building and individual classroom. However, there is little doubt that the most direct--and perhaps most powerful--influence on student learning is the classroom teacher. Regardless of the commitment or expertise of building principals and superintendents, classroom teachers remain the crucial component in any school improvement program. Teachers are the ones who work most directly with students and, therefore, are the primary ingredient in any effort to improve students' performance.

Yet, teachers are often reluctant to try new ideas or innovations that require them to change the way they teach. Most of what teachers know about teaching, what they feel works for them instructionally, has been gained through personal experience in the classroom (Lortie, 1975). This knowledge typically comes through a series of trials and errors, verified in some fashion over time. In many ways, it's a sort of folk wisdom. To change the way teachers teach core academic areas (reading and math) means disrupting this hard-earned sense of

stability, questioning aspects of their "knowledge" of teaching practices. It also may mean risking making errors, perhaps some failures.

Little is known about the process by which teachers' reluctance toward new ideas or innovations can be transformed to a sense of commitment to innovation. One component of a comorehensive study recently completed for the U.S. Department of Education (Gersten, Carnine, Zoref, & Cronin, in press) did address this issue directly. The results of this study, coupled with the results of Guskey's (1982, 1984) research on mastery learning, provide several intriguing insights into the process of change. In addition, these results offer fairly clear directions as to how educational change can be facilitated, as well as some guidelines for directions to avoid.

The Direct Instruction Study

Context of the Study

In 1978 a Federally-supported compensatory education program (Follow Through) operating in a large urban district was asked by the U.S. Office of Education to adapt a more effective instructional model. At the time schools were offering a self-sponsored "laissez faire" approach in which teachers determined their own curriculum emphases and instructional time allocations. Under this approach the achievement levels of Black and Hispanic students in reading, language arts, and mathematics at the seven Follow Through schools had remained consistently low, ranging between the 20th and 28th percentile on standardized tests. The district was given six months to select a research-based instructional model and begin implementation.

Administrators in the district selected Direct Instruction, a highly structured, basic skills approach, using the Distar Reading and Language Curricula. This was done without input from the teachers in the Follow Through program. The decision to select Direct Instruction was largely due to the documentation of its success in inner city school districts in an evaluation funded by the U.S. Department of Education (Stebbins, et al., 1977). In addition, one school in the district had been using Distar with its Hispanic students and had demonstrated significant achievement gains. However, it was clear from local records (Emrick & Peterson, 1979) that the major motive behind the decision was the Federal government's demand that the district either utilize a very different approach or lose over a million dollars in federal support.

Because of lengthy negotiations, the decision regarding program implementation was not reached until late summer, less than two months before the school term was to begin. Thus, teachers were not informed of the program adoption until they returned to school in early September. Two days of preservice training were provided for the teachers. Then all 21 Follow Through teachers in kindergarten and first grade were asked to implement the Direct Instruction model. Second grade implementation was delayed for one year. Consultants from the University of Oregon were asked to make regular visits to the district to provide technical assistance, monitor implementation, and train the district's own staff development personnel in specific techniques for supervising Direct Instruction programs.

Direct instruction is an extremely structured academic program. The reading, language, and mathematics curricula include a teachers' guide that spell out in detail exactly how teachers are to present a new skill, exactly which examples should be used to present a new concept, how much practice will be required, how to assess student mastery on an ongoing basis, and how to correct student errors. The model calls for an intensive academic focus, beginning in kindergarten . . . a major shift at that time in the district.

This approach was dramatically different from the "laissez faire" approach used previously in the seven Follow Through schools.

The method of supervision is also rather unique. New teachers are observed at least once a week. The supervisor provides specific feedback on how the teacher is doing, perhaps suggesting alternative teaching techniques, sometimes actually demonstrating how to use a new technique by "taking over" a group for 5-10 minutes. Supervisors also review placement and grouping decisions, primarily on the basis of students' performance on criterion - referenced tests. They will also pinpoint classroom management problems and suggest approaches for improving motivation of low-performing students, noise level, etc. Teachers receive a weekly "technical assistance" form containing the supervisor's analysis and suggestions.

Needless to say, the degree of change required of these teachers was enormous. Many expressed initial resentment, resistance, and frustration. A research study was conducted to comprehensively analyze program implementation and the accompanying changes that took place over a two-year period. Part of

this research involved in-depth interviews with all teachers in the program. These interviews were conducted each spring by an agency unaffiliated with either the school district or the Direct Instruction program staff. The information gathered over this two-year period by the interviewers offers unique insights into the evolution of teachers' attitudes and their feelings toward structured educational models and the process of change in general (Emrick & Peterson, 1979; Cronin, 1980).

Findings

Magnitude of Change

All teachers reported that the approach to teaching represented by the Direct Instruction program was different from both the way they had been trained and the way they had previously taught. The only exception was one teacher new to the teaching profession. The two differences most frequently mentioned by the teachers were the amount of structure and the heavy "time-on-task," basic skills emphasis. Not a single teacher had used a format as structured as those used in teaching the Distar curriculum. Some reported feeling initially stifled by a program in which "all decisions are made for you." Others resented the loss of control over determining the amount of time devoted to reading, language arts, and mathematics. However, none of the teachers felt that Direct Instruction was a particularly difficult approach to master. The Distar curricula were typically perceived as concise, well-defined, and straight-forward.

Initial Implementation Problems

The majority of teachers expressed resentment at having no input in the decision to adopt the Direct Instruction model. For example, one teacher said:

> The two days of preservice training would have been more helpful if I hadn't been so angry. I didn't really listen to very much after we were told (by a district staff member) 'This is what we will be doing this year; like it or get out.'

This problem was exacerbated by the rushed and abbreviated training program.

Once the school year began, teachers found that for the first time in their professional careers, their performance was monitored by unannounced weekly visits from a consultant. Teachers at two schools balked at these unannounced visits and pressured the school principals to require prescheduled observations. The consultants opposed this idea, believing that it defeated the purpose of their observations. After several meetings and negotiations, the issue was resolved in favor of the consultants, with the reluctant approval of the teachers.

Strained relationships between the consultants and many teachers continued throughout much of the first year. Many teachers felt the standards set by the consultants were too high, that the observations made by the consultants were inconsistent, and that they were uncomfortable "being checked up on." However, by the end of the year, several teachers reported that the observations and inclass visits were extremely helpful. As one teacher put it:

> The demonstrations in the classroom were the most helpful part of the training. These were the real-world test of how Distar operates. More demonstrations in my own classroom would have been even more helpful, especially in the beginning.

The situation kept improving. In fact, by the end of the second year, over

half of the teachers reported deriving benefits from classroom visits. Feedback in the classroom by the chief consultant was considered to be clear and very relevant to day-to-day problems (Cronin, 1980, p.28).

Philosophical Clashes and Resolutions

During the early interviews, a constant refrain voiced by almost half the teachers concerned the conflict between the basic skills "time-on-task" orientation of Direct Instruction and their own view that a teacher of young, disadvantaged children should attend to the whole child, fostering his or her emotional and social, as well as academic growth. By the end of the second year, all but one of the twenty-three teachers interviewed agreed that "Direct Instruction was compatible with their educational philosophy" (Cronin, 1980, p.23).

This dramatic change in philosophy and thinking was the strongest and most fascinating finding in the study. Despite the rushed circumstances of preservice training, lack of support from the principals, lack of consensus-gathering or attitudinal activities, and sometimes unrealistically high demands placed on the teachers, most seemed to shift their attitudes when they saw that the new model actually helped the children learn and improved their effectiveness as teachers.

The interview team reported "teachers seemed to derive great satisfaction from seeing their children read, speak in correct sentences, and attain more positive self-concepts..., teachers also mentioned increased self-reliance, greater social maturity, and a decrease in 'acting out behaviors' from their

students as further by-products of experiences in the Direct Instruction program (Cronin, 1980, p.24)."

One teacher offered a partial explanation for this dramatic shift in attitude. She explained that the conflict that she initially perceived between her child-centered humanistic educational philosophy and the Direct Instruction model had been more "apparent than real" (Cronin, 1980, p.23). Her statement is worthy of further comment. The senior author of this paper experienced such a shift in his thinking in the early seventies, when he was a reading teacher in Roxbury, an inner-city area in Boston. He, too, was trained in child-centered approaches to education, yet slowly began to see that they were not helping him teach the first and second graders he was working with. Slowly, largely from feedback from the students, he realized that beginning reading is a skill requiring clear instructions, adequate guided practice on each subskill, systematic review, and high degrees of structure. And that the students thrived under an intelligently structured approach, both in terms of skill acquisition and attitudes towards reading. The review, the repetition, the insistence on mastery, in no way hindered their imagination, their interest in reading or writing. In fact, the success with the consequent rise in self-esteem seemed to actually increase their interest in reading and writing and talking about reading. This teacher emphasized that it seemed important to first use a new method like Direct Instruction before an accurate appraisal of its value could be made.

Comparable Research on Mastery Learning

The idea that significant change in teachers' beliefs and perceptions generally follows successful implementation of a new innovation has also been noted in Guskey's research involving the implementation of mastery learning (Guskey, 1982, 1984, 1985). In one study (Guskey, 1984), a large group of intermediate and high school teachers was trained in the use of mastery learning techniques. Following the training the vast majority of these teachers used the techniques in their classes and saw dramatic improvement in their students' learning as a result. However, a small group of teachers used the new techniques and saw little or no improvement in the learning of their students, and another small group of teachers never bothered to try the new techniques at all.

When measures of change in teachers' beliefs and perceptions were analyzed following implementation, the teachers who saw learning improvements expressed increased responsibility for student learning outcomes and more positive affect toward teaching. That is, they felt greater personal responsibility for how well or how poorly their students learned and became much more positive in their attitudes toward teaching. But at the same time, these teachers expressed diminished confidence in their teaching abilities. Apparently, gaining proof of their increased effectiveness disrupted the confidence these teachers had first expressed in their teaching abilities. These changes were experienced, however, only by the teachers who saw improvement in their students' learning. The beliefs and perceptions of the teachers who used the new techniques but saw little or no improvement and those who never attempted implementation remained

relatively unchanged, similar to a control group of teachers.

Guskey thus concluded that inservice training and the implementation of a new innovation alone may be insufficient conditions for change in teachers' beliefs and perceptions. Apparently, teachers must first gain tangible evidence that the new practices will work in their classrooms with their students. Then, and perhaps as Guskey (1984) suggests, only then are significant change in teachers beliefs and perceptions likely to result.

Discussion

The idea that changes in teachers' attitudes and thinking follow, rather than precede, changes in teachers' classroom behaviors runs counter to much current practice. Many contemporary inservice programs set out initially to change teachers' attitudes or gain some sense of commitment from teachers prior to the implementation of a new program. This is often done by citations of research and/or awareness sessions whose goal is to foster positive attitudes towards the innovation.

However, Guskey's (1984) research, as well as that of Crandall and his associates (Crandall, 1982, 1983) suggest that such efforts, in and of themselves, are unlikely to bring about any real change. Serious commitment is likely to occur only after teachers have had an opportunity to use the new program or innovation and have seen that it really assists them in teaching their students, especially the difficult-to-teach students.

Since serious teacher commitment rarely occurs prior to the implementation of a new program, it is critically important to find alternative ways of

encouraging teachers to engage in the new practice. Several researchers have suggested a number of ways in which this can be done. Crandall (1983), for example, found that training by a person judged by teachers to be "credible and practically oriented" is essential, especially during the early phase of implementation. This emerged as a major theme in the San Diego research study. (To be effective, trainers or consultants must provide teachers with information that is useful and applicable to their day-to-day experiences in the classroom, not theoretical overviews).

It is equally important to provide teachers with ways to gain evidence of the effects of their efforts on valued student outcomes. Teachers need to see that the often difficult (or awkward) changes they are making result in some form of improvement. The best sort of evidence for this purpose, however, is usually not end-of-year standardized test results. In the Direct Instruction study for example, teachers' attitudes began to change when they saw their children begin to read better, speak in more correct and more sophisticated fashion, and use their class time more efficiently. In mastery learning programs, teachers' attitudes began to change when they saw improvements in students' performance on weekly teacher-developed formative tests, and when there was greater student involvement during class sessions. It is also important to keep in mind, however, that these changes do not occur overnight, but evolve over a period of time.

"We believe that the issues encountered in the implementation of this program are not unique, but are likely to be encountered in many school improvement

programs. The experience has taught us two major lessons. The first is that providing competent and knowledgeable technical assistance to teachers is extremely important--and difficult to do in a sensitive but direct fashion. The second is that changes in attitudes usually follow, rather than proceed, changes in behaviors.

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